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C O N F I D E N T I A L YEREVAN 000863

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM AM

SUBJECT: CONFIDANTE SEEKS TO CLARIFY, DEFEND EX-PRESIDENT'S ANTI-WESTERN SPEECH

REF: A. YEREVAN 840
 B. YEREVAN 846

Classified By: AMB. Marie L. Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Opposition leader Levon Ter-Petrossian (LTP) confidante David Shahnazarian -- sensing our displeasure -- sought an urgent follow-up meeting with Ambassador October 21 with an eye toward U.S. damage control, after Ter-Petrossian's conspiratorial, anti-Western speech October 17. Saying that he personally disagreed with both the sentiments and the necessity, Shahnazarian said LTP was convinced it was a necessary political maneuver to shore up his more radical constituencies and keep them on board. Shahnazarian said these elements -- especially family and close friends of the political detainees still in jail -- were on the brink of leaving the movement and taking a more aggressive stance. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) SIGNALING OUR DISPLEASURE: The Ambassador had had a previously-scheduled introductory call on former President Levon Ter-Petrossian for Monday, October 20. We chose to cancel that meeting without comment, given the unfortunate timing hard on the heels of LTP's anti-U.S. speech the Friday night before. The message was clearly received, as Shahnazarian reached out to us that afternoon with an urgent request to see the ambassador once again. We arranged the follow-up meeting for October 21. Ambassador expressed to Shahnazarian that, notwithstanding the advance warning (Ref A), we had been quite disappointed by the tone and content of LTP's October 17 speech, which she deplored as pure political opportunism. She pointed out that visiting EUR A/S Fried had also seen the text of the speech before he left Armenia, and was seriously displeased. When Fried met Shahnazarian and other key LTP allies, he had made the point that LTP should act in Armenia's national interest, even if that meant putting partisan political advantage to one side. LTP had chosen the opposite course.

¶3. (C) DISAGREEMENT IN THE RANKS: Shahnazarian asserted that he had argued with LTP about some of the language used in the October 17 speech, especially the accusations about the United States. The Ambassador pointedly reminded that LTP had called the United States "doubly immoral" in its mediation role over Nagorno Karabakh. Shahnazarian agreed this was unfair rhetoric, but said that LTP had been convinced that such strong language was "necessary to hold the movement together," particularly as they made the unpopular (with their core base) announcement of the end of mass demonstrations.

¶4. (C) AREAS OF AGREEMENT AND QUALMS ON NK: Shahnazarian reprised his Ref A talking points from October 14, but this time went further in debunking the substance of LTP's public remarks (ref B). He agreed that there seems to be a historic window of opportunity to make progress on Turkey and Nagorno Karabakh (NK), and that this is in Armenia's national interests. He declared "If you tell me Serzh Sargsian can

resolve Nagorno Karabakh and Turkey and remove Russian troops from Armenia, than I am his number 1 supporter." He doubted Sargsian's ability to achieve these things, however. He claimed that he had spoken with a number of former "commanders" of the NK war who had expressed great anxiety about the government's negotiating position on NK. Shahnazarian offered specific concerns over two NK-related negotiating points, on which he believed the current Armenian administration might concede too much: 1) on near-term return of Azerbaijani refugees/IDPs to NK proper (vice other occupied territories), and 2) on any compromise over Armenian control of the Lachin corridor, which connects Armenia and NK.

¶5. (C) U.S. STAYING THE COURSE: The Ambassador reiterated U.S. commitment to the Minsk Group negotiating process, and our determination to help the parties reach a negotiated solution. She observed that the process is making headway, and must be continued. She said that we "understand politics"; every country has its own domestic political manuevering and that's normal. However, LTP's speech, with its distortions of fact, seemed to exceed the boundaries of fair public discourse. She said that this is a time that Armenians of all stripes should unite behind the national interest. Shahnazarian took the point, but argued that the Armenian National Congress' decision to suspend public rallies would strengthen President Sargsian's hand in NK negotiations, and give him sufficient manuevering room. He asserted that LTP's fundamental view of the West and of the NK and Turkey issues had not changed, notwithstanding the October 17 rhetoric.

YOVANOVITCH